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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001649

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STATE FOR NEA/PPD
STATE ALSO FOR OES/PCI/Ellen Shaw
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INTERIOR FOR International/Washburne
INTERIOR FOR USGS/International
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SUBJECT: NEA ESTH Conference Links ESTH To Full Range of Diplomatic Goals, Skills

1. (SBU) Summary: Thirty-eight officers from a range of U.S. departments and NEA missions met in Wadi Mousa, Jordan February 2-3 for a workshop to discuss U.S. environment, science, technology and health (ESTH) priorities in the region. The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to explore the role of ESTH issues in advancing USG goals for sustainable development, economic and political stability. The event also boosted participants' understanding of the USG's ESTH priorities, provided success stories and lessons learned, promoted State-USAID cooperation, and provided a forum for dialogue between Washington and the field, and networking among NEA posts. End summary.

2. OES PDAS Bud Rock and EPA Assistant Administrator Judith Ayres co-chaired a February 2-3 workshop of Embassy and USAID Mission representatives from 10 countries in the NEA region and five USG agencies. The goals were to acquaint the participants with key ESTH issues in the region and to provide practical "tools of the trade" to effectively advance USG ESTH priorities. Several overriding themes emerged:

- ESTH work promotes USG goals across the board. This includes political goals such as good governance and civil society, economic goals such as free markets and trade, and development goals including health. Even non-traditional partners such as the military often have an interest in ESTH issues.

- ESTH efforts and the broad context of sustainable development are people-oriented and play an important role in helping to improve the quality of life at home and abroad.

- USG employees engaged in ESTH work need the full range of diplomatic skills to understand the issues, report on them and build the partnerships to address them.

Knowing the Issues and the Players

3. One focal point of the conference was to educate the participants on ESTH issues and the USG bureaus that work on those issues so that officers and FSNs can tap the knowledge and resources of the appropriate bureaus when necessary. Overseas counterparts are often interested in how the United States deals with particular issues. This means USG employees working on ESTH issues overseas need to be familiar with the U.S. domestic context and to be able to find out more about it. At the conference, due to the presence of experts from these agencies, special attention was paid to strengthening ties between State, USAID, EPA, USDA and the Department of Interior. But ESTH officers in the field were encouraged to tap USG expertise in any of the USG technical agencies. The shift away from infrastructure towards a policy and legal framework for ESTH issues makes these intra-USG contacts crucial.

Telling America's Environmental Story Abroad

4. Another focal area of the conference was linking ESTH issues and public diplomacy. As part of the USG "Muslim World Outreach" initiative, State has been developing a component focusing on ESTH cooperation, which is useful for public outreach to NEA countries because U.S. scientific and technical expertise is held in high esteem throughout the Muslim world. ESTH-related issues such as the tsunami are often at the center of public attention, and thus represent a public showcase for American expertise, values, policies and technology.

5. The United States has an environmental record second to none, and the public diplomacy "toolbox" has the information to back that up. American environmental policy and actions include not only the government but also the private sector,

NGO's, the international arena and grassroots volunteers. This makes it important to present the U.S. environmental situation in its full context, not just in its governmental aspects. Please refer to <http://infocentral.state.gov> (USG only and password protected but unclassified) and <http://usinfo.state.gov> (public).

More to Climate Change Than Kyoto

16. Participants in the workshop discussed climate change, an issue for which the U.S. has a good story to tell, despite the fact that the U.S. is frequently criticized for not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. The USG has a large and wide-ranging commitment to climate change. This includes USD5 billion spent on climate change science and policy in FY05, and programs such as the International Partnership for the Hydrogen Economy and the "Methane-to-Markets" program.

Health Issue Links ESTH, Development

17. Health specialists from USAID/Amman and OES's Office of International Health Affairs led participants in a discussion of health issues. While HIV/AIDS in the region has low prevalence, we need to work with host governments to keep it that way. Maternal and mother-child health issues affect many people, and correlate with other ESTH issues such as access to clean water.

OES Committed to Supporting the Field

18. OES PDAS Rock emphasized OES's commitment to supplying information that officers need in the field. He mentioned OES's "Issue Briefs" intranet site (see "Issue Briefs" under <http://oes.state.gov/>) as a useful tool for field officers. That site provides brief, issue-by-issue summaries, points of contact for individual issues, and the top issues for each country. The public diplomacy intranet and internet sites mentioned above are another useful source of information.

19. Participants in the conference discussion said it would be useful for them to have an OES cable "chron" and to have more effort in disseminating reports and information about USG-funded grants and projects in the region, in order to promote coordination. Talking points or a vocabulary list in Arabic would save translation time in the field on technical demarches, said participants. Rock said OES was open to comments from the field about what works and what doesn't, and what training is necessary.

110. Documents from the conference and other ESTH information are available through the NEA ESTH Hub web page at Embassy Amman's intranet site. See: (http://10.194.1.7/env_hub/home.htm).

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